

## CLASSICSCLIMBS

# Jonkershoek Classics

by JOHANN LANZ



Scrambling off the top of *Reverence*.  
Photo JOHANN LANZ

I have lived in the Jonkershoek Valley for more than twenty years. In that time I have had many days of superb walking and scrambling, but only climbed two rock routes, the challenging Western Wall and the much easier Scimitar Ridge. Both are good routes, but even so I have never held much hope for any more worthwhile routes in the valley, due to a reputation for loose rock, and so have pursued climbing and first ascents elsewhere. On this occasion however I was motivated by a day out in the hills with a kindred spirit. I anticipated a long, pleasant day of bushy scrambling on loose rock. But I have always looked at one line with some hope, although never enough to get me onto it. 'If we never try it, we will never know,' I reasoned, and so we did.

The motivation for the adventure was all Ross's [Suter]. He had done some trail running below the walls of Second Ridge Peak in Jonkershoek, also known as The Cathedral, and had felt the pull.

What climber wouldn't be powerfully drawn to this magnificent, soaring monument to those forces that have shaped the Cape Fold Mountains? Writing in the 1946 journal, A.B. Berrisford says:

“

*During the years 1926 to 1929 I had been party to many expeditions to the Jonkershoek area, and had come to look on these fine peaks as a favourite happy hunting ground. My vivid memories are of beautiful scenery, magnificent tree-ferned ravines and kloofs with green slopes leading up to really incredible looking cliffs 2,000 feet sheer, culminating at the very tops of the peaks. The finest of these cliffs are without doubt those of the Second Ridge Peak.*

”





Photo JOHANN LANZ

## Reverence

Tuesday 18 March was one of the best days I've had in the mountains. Ever. A lot came together that day. Our approach in the dark with a full moon setting across the valley, promised a gorgeous, still, autumn day. From the outset, the line opened itself to us. The ground slowly fell away. The exposure intensified. The sanctity of The Cathedral enveloped us. Two old Western Cape mountain dogs finally found a day worthy of sharing a rope together and a perfect space in which to be where they love most.

A few weeks after the opening ascent of *Reverence*, I had another of my best days in the hills – the second ascent. The motivation for this day was all mine. I was totally excited to show off what Ross and I had discovered, and it was apt that I was with Dirk Versfeld and Adam Roff. Dirk had lived in Jonkershoek for many years, and had opened *Western Wall* before my arrival there. I later climbed it with him as one of my first country routes. Adam is an outspoken fan of everything Jonkershoek, and one of a small group of finishers of the Jonkershoek Marathon. We styled up the route. It was a long, truly brilliant day spent with good buddies in the most inspiring of places – what country climbing is all about, at its very best. It was gratifying to realise also, that although age and experience don't do much for sport climbing performance, they do carry benefits for country climbing. We were back at my home well before sundown – not a trivial achievement, as some other, younger, fitter, but less experienced country route climbers have discovered. Did it justify a toast with my precious stash of Lagavulin? Indeed it did!

This climb represents to some extent for me an archetypal theme of the hero's journey – you set out, young and eager and travel through the world on a quest, to eventually return, older and wiser and find fulfilment in the very place that you left.

When I look now at the beautiful line of the arête, I cannot understand how it took me 20 years to climb it.

There is ego in a first ascent. There is pride, which is probably justified. But I like to think there is more. We climb, I think, in pursuit of those intensely personal moments of perfection, of flow. Everything about the climbing experience, when it comes together, facilitates these moments. And a big part of that is the journey shared with those who seek the same. When it came to naming the route, I wanted a name that captured the entirety of my experience of it. If that can be captured in a single word, then *Reverence* is it.

*Reverence* is a relatively accessible, moderate grade, but out-there, country climbing experience in a spectacular setting with good quality rock and climbing on an aesthetic and naturally flowing line. The four of us who climbed it had some discussion about whether the label 'classic' could be appropriate. I am biased of course, but I genuinely think that the quality of the climbing, and of the whole mountain experience, is on a par with other recognised Boland country classics of a similar grade. Berrisford again:

“The Second Ridge Peak has been greatly neglected by rock climbers over the last fifteen years. This is most surprising, for the length, quality and sensation cannot be bettered in our Cape mountains.”

Since Berrisford wrote that, it has remained neglected for much longer. *Reverence* is the first route to be opened on the mountain for 65 years! Perhaps it will finally be neglected no more.

Dirk enjoying the final pitch of *Reverence*, with the Jonkershoek Valley far below. Photo ADAM ROFF



Will *Reverence* be a classic? That is not for Ross and I to say. Only time will tell. What I know for sure though, is that every time I drive home up the valley, the spectacular Cathedral stands magnificently before me. And up its centre, particularly in the afternoon light, the line of the *Reverence* arête stands out for me as its proudest feature.



## CLASSICS CLIMBS



## FACT FILE

## Reverence

FA: Johann Lanz, Ross Suter. March 2014

**Area:** Second Ridge Peak, Jonkershoek, Stellenbosch

**Grade:** 18

**Pitches:** 7 roped pitches plus 2 scrambling sections (between pitches 2 and 3; and above pitch 7)

**Approach time:** From the reserve gate approximately 3 hr 30 min. From the start of the Berg River Nek hiking trail on Sirkel Pad 2 hr 15 min.

**Climbing time:** 8 to 9 hr (from start of pitch 1 to the end of the scrambling above pitch 7).

**Descent time:** To the reserve gate 3 hr 30 min. To the hiking trail-head 2 hr 15 min.

**Aspect:** South-west. The route is in shade most of the day, and you are likely to only encounter sun at the top of pitch 7, perhaps earlier in midsummer.

**Best time of year:** November to March. You need long days and will be glad for the warmth.

**Gear:** Two 60-metre ropes – every pitch is longer than 50 metres. Standard trad rack with many slings to avoid rope drag.

## Access

The Jonkershoek entrance gate poses a problematic time constraint for doing the route, as it only opens for vehicle entrance at 7 am and closes at 6 pm (winter) or 7 pm (summer) – too short a time for the round trip. The most viable and enjoyable way of doing the route would be to drive into the reserve in the afternoon, walk up and sleep near the base and climb the following day. However, Cape Nature does not permit overnighting in the mountain. It is possible to leave your car outside the reserve and walk in (and out) at any time of day, but it is a longer walk-in. To do the route, you are required to get permission from Cape Nature and to fill in their safety form (as it is off designated trails). Contact the Jonkershoek reserve manager, Patrick Shone at 021 8661560.

## Approach

Walking from the Jonkershoek entrance gate: Take the first road left immediately after the entrance gate, then the second road to the left that winds its way up (the first left is a contour road). Turn right at the T-junction on the high contour road and

then the next road left takes you steeply up and then around the corner all the way into Langrivier. From Langrivier, follow the contour path towards Berg River Nek. Go through one significantly forested kloof, that is flowing off from below the Slabs Route, then reach the cairn marking the turn off the contour path, just before you get to the second forested kloof (approx. 2 hr 45 min.)

**From a vehicle inside the reserve:** Drive to the top of the Sirkel Pad. Walk up the Panorama Hiking Route towards Berg River Nek. Where the path reaches the contour path, turn left. Walk below Third Ridge Peak, around the corner and into a forested kloof draining off Second Ridge Peak (approx. 1 hr 30 min.)

Just after the kloof, the turn off the contour path is marked by a cairn on top of a boulder next to the path. It is much the same place as for going up the Slabs Route, but take the ridge to the right that overlooks the forested kloof to its right (Slabs approach takes a vague ridge to the left). Before the top of the ridge, contour across the steep slope to go through a break in the lowest rock band (cairn). Cross the water-course between the lowest and next rock bands and ascend the gully behind by climbing the rock slabs on its left side (cairn) to a small nek. Drop down to cross the little stream flowing out from the left of Pisa Ridge (reliable water), and continue along the base of the cliffs for 100 metres or so to just before the high point of the bushy ledge that you are on, before it descends into Pinnacle Kloof (approx. 45 min. from contour path).

Johann finding fulfilment close to home.  
The very best of days out. Photo DIRK VERSFELD







Pitches 1 to 3 are approach pitches that get you up and onto the arête. Pitches 4 to 7 go up the arête for 200+ metres.

**Start:** At the high point of the ledge, the wall forms a blunt arête undercut by an orange overhang with a tree to its right. 10 metres left is a clean crack marked with a large cairn at its base.

**1. 58m (16):** Start up the crack, moving slightly right higher up onto less steep rock. Then go slightly left or straight up rock bands to finish on a wide vegetated ledge straight above the start. In order to climb the next pitch in one rope length, cross the ledge and belay at the base of the next rock band.

**2. 59m (16):** Climb a 3-metre high crack in a block of rock, then left up a jagged layback crack for a few metres and up and slightly left again into a recessed corner system of laybacks. At the top of the corner, climb a rightwards-tending crack through a clean white face (visible from below). Cross a ledge above and climb up the last, short rock band onto the top of the ridge-line of Pisa Ridge.

From here, the ridge-line has a horizontal section of about 25 metres in length. Walk along it and then, at the first rock band, traverse carefully out right along a narrow ledge for a hundred metres or so to where it ends in an area of very long grass. Wade up through this to scramble up the side of the rounded white pillar, that leans against the face behind, to a nice ledge on a boulder on its left before it steepens.

**3. 56m (17):** Climb up the pillar to a ledge and then up cracks in the shallow open book directly behind it, taking care in exiting because of loose rock (sticking left above the open book avoids the worst of it). Belay on a wide vegetated ledge.

Walk up and right across the ledge to belay for the next pitch directly on the arête, at a bollard-type rock feature, with a small cairn on top.

**4. 52m (16):** Climb straight up the arête. Stance on a 4-metre-long vegetated ledge with a large block on its right-hand side.

**5. 56m (18):** Climb up from the left-hand side of the ledge. Move a metre right and up a crack for a few metres, then 2 metres left into a corner system with a loose block in it. Moving past the loose block is somewhat run-out (place decent gear before you start up the corner). Climb up and rightwards out of the corner

to gain the steep wall above the overhangs. Climb straight up on jugs, moving left towards the arête where the angle eases, to stance on a small ledge directly on the arête, with a larger ledge a metre above and behind it.

**6. 56m (16):** Pass the larger ledge easily up the face on the right, and then from a ledge climb left onto the steep arête above. Higher up, move left below an overhanging block to climb short twin cracks. Climb the easier angled arête above to stance in (or just below) a large, blocky notch on the arête.

**7. 54m (17):** Scramble straight up easy angled rock for about 10 metres or so to the base of a steeper wall and a little buttress which is undercut by a roof with rock on it that has an almost melted, lava-like appearance. Climb onto the face above the roof from the right and go straight up. Move up over a few metres of easier ground and then straight up the steep arête above, to stance at the top of it.

From here you can coil ropes and scramble along the knife-edge ridge for about 150 metres. Just before the top of the ridge-line, traverse left to the neck it forms with the main peak. There are several, approximately 5-metre-high, exposed vertical rock steps along the ridge where care should be taken and where a rope may be advisable.

## DESCENT

The descent is down the *Slabs Route*. Walk over the top of Second Ridge Peak in a northerly direction to pick up the beacons of the *Slabs Route* which descends fairly intricately north-west off the peak down ledges and ridges and across the top of a thin gully to gain a broad, vegetated gully that runs down past the pinnacle of the clock tower on the right and then takes a 90-degree turn to the left. After the left turn, move to the right of the gully (going down) to pick up a vague path and cairns which lead you rightwards down scrambles, then straight down and then left along a traverse ledge that brings you to the base of the rock bands into a clearing under some trees. Descend the same slope that you ascended on the approach to reach the contour path. From the summit to the contour path is about 1 hr 30 min.

